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Russia Approves New Chemical Weapons Destruction Plan

ARMS CONTROL TODAY

Seth Brugger

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov approved a resolution July 5 to overhaul Moscow's existing 1996 plan to destroy its chemical weapons. The new scheme would require an extension of the Chemical Weapons Convention's (CWC) deadlines but could reduce demilitarization costs by 30-50 percent. ([See text of new plan.](#))

Kasyanov approved the resolution after it was initially reviewed by several government agencies in mid-June and subsequently modified by the Russian Munitions Agency (RMA), the civilian body heading chemical weapons destruction. According to an RMA official, the Russian government does not need to take further action for the plan to come into force.

Under its new plan, Russia would finish destroying its chemical weapons stockpile by 2012, missing the final convention deadline in 2007, by which member states must have completely eliminated their chemical weapons arsenals. This schedule would force Moscow to seek approval from CWC's oversight body, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), to take advantage of a CWC provision that allows extension of the deadline by up to five years. Moscow will "most likely" submit its new plan this fall to the OPCW, the RMA official said.

The plan's destruction schedule also misses all intermediate convention deadlines for destroying certain percentages of Russia's "Category 1" (the highest "risk" category) chemical weapons. Russia missed the first intermediate CWC deadline in April 2000 for destroying these weapons, which the OPCW extended by two years.

Russia had previously planned to build seven facilities to eliminate its chemical weapons, one at each of its chemical weapons storage locations. To save money, the new plan will scale back the number of destruction facilities to three, which will be located at Gorny, Shchuch'ye, and Kambarka, the official said.

Moscow plans to operate the Gorny facility from 2002 to 2005 and the Shchuch'ye and Kambarka sites from 2005 to 2011. Rather than construct a demilitarization facility at the Kizner storage site, under the new resolution Russia will transport weapons stored at Kizner to Shchuch'ye for destruction before 2012.

According to the RMA official, this last provision is in response to demands placed on Russia by the U.S. Congress. Led by the House, Congress has blocked new U.S. funding for the Shchuch'ye facility for the past two fiscal years. Last year, even though it did not resume funding, Congress said future appropriations should be conditional upon Russia meeting five requirements, including a demand that Moscow use only one site to destroy its entire nerve-agent stockpile, which is stored at several locations, including Kizner.

In a significant step toward renewing U.S. funding for Shchuch'ye, on August 1 the House Armed Services Committee matched the Bush administration's \$35 million request for the project for the upcoming fiscal year, also conditional upon the same five requirements.

In addition to constructing demilitarization facilities, Russia's new plan also allows Moscow to construct facilities at the Pochep, Leonidovka, and Maradykovsky sites to neutralize chemical agents stored at these locations. But the official said that a final decision on building these facilities will depend on "the outcome of the operation" of the destruction facilities. Whether agents would be transported to Shchuch'ye for destruction after neutralization also remains undetermined.

The resolution also calls for Russia to destroy its chemical weapons production facilities (CWPFs) that are not converted for civilian use by April 29, 2007, as required by the convention. Of its 24 declared CWPFs, six have been destroyed, and seven have been converted.

The revised plan is the latest in a series of steps to improve Russia's struggling chemical demilitarization effort. On May 4, President Vladimir Putin approved the creation of a new commission, headed by former Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko, to "ensure cooperation" between federal and regional bodies dealing with chemical weapons destruction and to help oversee the demilitarization process. Additionally, last December, Russia boosted demilitarization funding six fold to approximately \$105 million for the current fiscal year, according to the RMA official.

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1100 H Street NW, #520
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